DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 313 049 IR 052 952

AUTHOR Dahl, Katherine
TITLE One Chance in Eighty: Access to the Alternative Press Index.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Libraries; Higher Education; *Indexes; Interviews; Liberalism; *Library Collection Development; Library Schools; Library Standards; Library Surveys; *Periodicals; Public Libraries; *Resource Materials; School Libraries; Secondary Education; Special Libraries
IDENTIFIERS *Alternative Press Index; Controversial Topics; Library Bill of Rights

ABSTRACT

A librarian at the Western Illinois University Library examined a list of the approximately 380 current subscribers to the Alternative Press Index (API), which has been the only access point to most periodicals on the political left since its beginning in 1969, in order to see who and what kinds of libraries receive the index. The Library Bill of Rights--which advocates the provision of library resources reflecting all points of view on current and historical issues--is cited as a standard for the inclusion of API as part of library collections, and the results of an analysis of the subscriber list and telephone interviews with a number of API subscribers are presented. The findings indicate that approximately 1 in 80 public, academic, school, and special libraries in the United States subscribe to API. Colleges and universities are the biggest subscribers (1 in 18), and 41 of the 53 U.S. American Library Association-accredited library schools subscribe to it. Approximately 1 in 200 public libraries also subscribes to the index, although three states have no library of any kind that subscribes to API. Brief reports of conversations with librarians from several public libraries, as well as libraries from public universities and private and community colleges, private and public high schools, and organizations that receive the API, indicate that they subscribe to API because of its coverage of such topics as women's and minority studies, controversial issues, counterespionage, terrorism, and political happenings. (SD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED313049

ONE CHANCE IN EIGHTY: ACCESS TO THE ALTERNATIVE PRESS INDEX

Katherine Dahl

University Library

Western Illinois University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Katherine Dahl
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ABSTRACT

The Alternative Press Index (API) since its beginning in 1969 has been the only access point to most periodicals on the political left. The Alternative Press Center supplied the author with a list of its present subscribers. That list was examined to see who and what kinds of libraries were getting the API. Very few libraries, only one in eighty in the United States, get the API. Colleges and universities are the biggest subscribers to the index. Proportionately, very few public libraries get the index. Courageously, three high schools and seven junior colleges get the index. Not getting the Alternative Press Index makes it much more difficult for a library to fulfill the injunctions of the "Library Bill of Rights" -- a document that was intended to be lived up to.

First of all, I have no connections whatsoever with the Alternative Press Center, producers of the Alternative Press Index (which I will henceforth usually call the API

IR053952

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

or the index). I called the center in summer 1988, asking them if they would be willing to share with me their list of subscribers so I could study who was receiving the index. My interest was piqued by the fact that the library I joined in 1987 had stopped getting the index in 1984. Last year, I was able to get the wheels in motion so that my library would again be receiving the index.

I assured the Alternative Press Center that my intentions were honorable as regards wanting to have access to the subscription list. And I want to assure all of you that I will not inundate you with all kinds of statistics! As the March 13, 1989 New Yorker cartoon entitled "American Stat Family" makes clear, spouters of statistics can be too much at times. (On the other hand, don't we all, each month, rather like the statistics in Harper's "Harper's Index?").

While the one chance in eighty is correct when all libraries (public, university, special, and so forth -- but not public and private elementary and secondary schools) are counted, I really intended for my title to simply indicate that so very few libraries get the index. One chance in forty, one in sixty, one in eighty -- it really doesn't matter what the chance is, if it is only a very small chance.

If I had been dealing only with colleges and universities, the chance would have been one in eighteen; if

dealing with public libraries, it would have been one in about 200. Again, the actual figure is not important; what is important is that it is low. It's a last-place-like figure.

With only, then, about 380 current subscriptions, it is quite true that the API has done things that aggravate us: it has been, at times, erratic in its issuance and has come out later than we would like. But the Alternative Press Center is no H.W. Wilson, no University Microfilms: it is a few-personed operation, doing the best it can. It -- and not that other press -- should have been named the Shoe String Press.

As you have probably surmised, I want more libraries to get the API. In light of the tenets of the American Library Association's "Library Bill of Rights," how could I not want that? A goal of libraries is to provide as many points of view as possible. The API helps us provide certain points of view, at least preliminary access to certain points of view. It indexes magazines and journals which sometimes are disparagingly referred to as being "out in left field." It does not index publications which are "out in right field." We probably all wish there was a good index to those "out-in-right-field" publications; maybe an entrepreneur is presently preparing such an index.

The API began in 1969, in those times of turmoil.

Who, then, gets the index? First, some private

citizens get it (and if that information has been added to some files in Washington, D.C., so be it).

And libraries, almost four hundred of them, get the index: libraries of various kinds and types. Many of the "powerhouse" universities get it; some of the universities with the largest enrollments do too. Every Ivy League institution, every Big Ten institution, and every seven sisters school gets it (except Barnard, and they can get the index at Columbia).

In the category of University of Illinois, University of Iowa, University of Arizona, University of Vermont [that is, every state's "university" or "universities" (as in the case of Indiana)], forty-three of the fifty receive the API.

A number of state universities also subscribe: Illinois State, Indiana State, Iowa State -- and Washington State, Wayne State, and Wright State.

Forty-one of the fifty-three ALA-accredited library schools have access to the API at their respective university libraries. The twelve that don't must have other ways of teaching about alternative publications, one would hope.

There are some shining points of light among the subscribers (these can't be the thousand points of light, however, that candidate/President Bush was describing because there aren't one thousand subscribers to the index!): Kearney State College can hold its own against the University of Nebraska -- they both receive it.

Say what we will about our beach friends to the far West, but a fairly impressive number of California university and college libraries subscribe to the index.

About one hundred and fifty colleges and universities receive the index; about one hundred private ones do also. We have just heard who some of them are. That the Columbias and Cornells, Dartmouths and Dukes subscribe probably doesn't surprise anyone. But maybe Alverno, Berea, Cedar Crest, Goddard, Simon's Rock of Bard, and Wittenberg subscribing does. It is heartening to know that there are some colleges with small budgets who are able to find money to purchase this index.

Berea College, whose efforts are concentrated in part on the advancement of the people of the Southern Appalachian region, has a all-freshmen-must-take seminar, the focus of which is individual rights and justice, minority problems and concerns. Of course, the API complements marvelously such a seminar. A Berea librarian told me that she found the API to be a "good source in which to find material on subjects that can't be found in other sources."[1]

And if Goddard College, with its fourteen faculty members, 70,000 volumes, and 185 periodicals, can do it, can't everyone? A Goddard librarian told me that she resumed the library's lapsed subscription to the index because she wanted to provide "access to other than the mainstream." She also felt that the index had a women's studies-use.

This librarian asserted that the API was the only source in which she could find enough information on counterintelligence programs.

Simon's Rock of Bard College is small, too: not even 200 students (they enter after the tenth or eleventh grade). Those students are lucky: they have access to an index that many of their fellow -- and older -- college students do not. Simon's Rock is setting an example for institutions with enrollments larger and far larger than its own to follow.

Six states and District of Columbia have no public college or university holding this index. These are all states with small populations. Twenty states have no private college or university holding the index (the six states that don't have a public university holding are included in the previous figure).

As already indicated, some religiously-affiliated colleges, usually liberal arts ones, subscribe to the index. But Jerry Falwell's Liberty University, Pat Robertson's CBN University, and Oral Roberts' Oral Roberts University do not subscribe. Neither does the Jimmy Swaggart Bible College.

A few nationally-prominent seminaries have their own subscriptions to the index. Harvard Theological and Yale Divinity don't, but divinity students at Harvard and Yale would have access to the index at the main library of the parent institution. A seminary affiliated with a church that a librarian I spoke with described as "pacifist"

also has the index. Per that librarian's request, I am letting that seminary remain anonymous.

None of the colleges listed in the Christian College Coalition's 1988 publication, Consider a Christian College: 75 Colleges Combining Academic Excellence and Enduring Spiritual Values, has a current subscription to the index.

The library at the United States Military Academy in West Point also gets the index -- and has for at least ten years. A reference librarian at the Academy told me that "the cadets are encouraged to put together papers on many points of view" -- and this index aids them in that process.

Some of the loudest applause must go the seven community and junior college libraries who receive the index. Students using those libraries have access to periodical references that students in many senior-level institutions do not.

A librarian at Northern Essex Community College in Massachusetts said that they began subscribing to the API in 1982 when the director became concerned about references that were, without the API, "blocked out from access" and concerned about "material not indexed by other indexes."

And a librarian at Bronx Area Community College told me she selected the API because it was "a good alternative," an "upstart choice." In fact, it was that community college librarian who convinced the API to begin indexing The Animals' Agenda.

Surely one of the stars shining most brightly is that of the Arkansas City, Kansas High School library: as of nine months ago, it was the only public high school in the entire United States receiving the API. Talking to their librarian was one of the most uplifting experiences of my life! Arkansas City -- 13,000 people, 1,000 students in grades nine through twelve: maybe not the city and high school you would guess to be the one and only as regards the API.

Bob Hicks, the librarian at Arkansas City - and he did say, "use my name" -- is a fully paper-credentialled librarian, a native Midwesterner. There have been no protests, riots, hangings in effigy, "Kansas Burnings," or getting rid of the high school librarian in Arkansas City, Kansas because the high school library gets, to some, a "radical" reference tool.

But there have been some Arkansas City students -- debate team members -- who have been awarded scholarships to Stanford and Yale, in part, librarian Hicks likes to believe, because their debate presentations were enhanced because they had access to extra references, the extra references afforded by the Alternative Press Index.

The Arkansas City High School library even gets twelve of the titles indexed in the API! Librarian Hicks said that the library is "more of a reference library than a leisure reading library," that research and information

are primary emphases. Adults and individuals outside of the school use the library too. As regards his students and patrons, Hicks suggested that the time to be -- and to begin to be -- idealistic is when you are young. He also declared that he wanted to increase the students' tolerance and expose them to diversity. This librarian is indeed heeding the injunctions of the "School Library Bill of Rights" -- and the "Library Bill of Rights."

Two Eastern preparatory schools, Williston-Northampton and Hotchkiss, also get the index. "Total awareness" is a goal for students at Williston-Northampton. A goal for students at Hotchkiss is to know that the "world thinks in different ways," according to the school librarian. That is one reason Hotchkiss has been receiving the API for at least fifteen years. Because of budgetary problems, Hotchkiss had planned to drop the index soon. After two telephone conversations with the Hotchkiss librarian, I was told that I had raised in her mind the whole issue of whether they really should be dropping the index. Again, I receive no money from the index and was not proselytizing for it.

A few companies, special interest groups, and organizations are index subscribers: some tilt to the left and some to the right. The Fellowship of Reconciliation receives the index, and so does Radio Martí. A national news agency gets it, a major labor union research library gets it, and Ralph

Nader has one of the organizations of which he is founder getting it. The United States Army has the index at several of its bases and at an officers' training school.

Sandia Laboratories in Albuquerque is in possession of the API. Sandia: isn't it in the engineering-of-all-the-non-nuclear-components-of-nuclear-weapons business, in the microchip-etching business, the test-band-verification-devices business? Yes, but terrorism and political happenings are of interest and concern to it, so it subscribes to the index.

Southern California Gas Company is another possibly-surprising subscriber to the index. Southern California Gas has a public affairs research section that is interested in issues that may affect the energy industry. Since some of the references in the API do pertain to energy issues, the Research Center of the Southern California Gas Company is interested in the API.

Since there are only about 380 current subscribers to the index, I cannot, of course, tell you that there are hundreds of public libraries getting it. In fact, there are only forty-two subscribing public and county libraries and eleven subscribing state library commissions and state departments "of something."

Twenty-nine states don't have even one public library that receives the index. These non-holding states tend to be the less-populated states -- Western, Great Plains, or

Southern states, exceptions being California, Colorado, Texas, and Washington. Heavily-populated California, New York, and Ohio have the most public libraries subscribing: six or seven each. Literally, then, there are more than thousand-mile stretches in this country where there are no API's in sight, no API's to be found.

Lincoln City Libraries in Nebraska told me that in the past five years they have added a number of alternative publications, including the API, to their collection. I'm not sure what arrangement scheme they follow, but in that library the API is supposed to be near the National Geographic Index: the tame and the not-so-tame together, it would seem. Although it is only six blocks from the University of Nebraska Library, which as we have heard subscribes to API too, Lincoln City Libraries did not use the fact that it was so close to the university as an excuse to stop getting the API.

The Grand Rapids, Michigan Public Library has had no trouble over the fact that it subscribes to the index. A librarian there told me that if the Gay Community News hadn't caused any trouble for the library, then probably the API would not either.

The Patchogue-Medford Library, headquarters for about fifty small libraries on Long Island, is another possessor of the index. It will, I believe, continue to hold the index close, as it were, to itself (and let no one take it

away) because that library is in Island Trees territory. Having been so closely exposed to censorship, it would never want to do anything that smacks of censorship. An Island Trees exhibit is making the rounds in two New York counties now. The Patchogue-Medford librarian I spoke with said that they try to have some unique things, some "fringe" materials. Another good librarian familiar with the "Library Bill of Rights!"

The Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana has just started getting the index. A librarian felt that the API has "the most general and best coverage of alternative publications."

A librarian at the Minnesota Legislative Reference Library said that he felt that the index is an essential tool: issues can come out of nowhere at the legislature -- and the API helps in finding material on those issues of interest to legislators. The Nebraska Library Commission tries to have as much controversial material as they can, including the API.

As regards the state libraries, commissions, and agencies which are receiving the index: none are in the South; the most "southern" are California, Illinois, and Nebraska!

States having no library whatsoever (no college, university, public, state library commission, state library, special, or business, etc.) getting the index are: Montana, Nevada, and South Dakota.

Is a particular library's not having the index a matter of attitude, a matter of money, or both?

If I have kept you in suspense about Illinois: eleven universities, the state library, the Center for Research Libraries, Chicago Public and Skokie Public, and a seminary all receive the index.

There are about one hundred non-United States subscribers to the index. Half of those are Canadian libraries. Australian, British, and Danish libraries are all well-represented among the other international subscribers.

Unless we want everyone to think alike and march to the same drummer, it would be disastrous if all remaining subscribers to the Alternative Press Index dropped their subscriptions: the pool of not-indexed-by-anyone journals would increase -- and our libraries would be less able to convey and reflect the world's exciting diversity.

NOTES

[1]Telephone interviews with all librarians referred to in this paper were conducted in January, February, and March 1989.